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# BEYOND THE BORDERS

Community Economic Development and Leadership Online Newsletter

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## **Building Communities**

### *Practical Tools and Information*

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**NDSU Extension Service, Community Economic Development Specialist**

*This newsletter is meant to share practical tools and information to assist you in your important role in community and economic development work. We welcome comments on current letters plus encourage your advice for future articles.*

*Kathy*

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## ***Editorial –***

### **NDSU Center for Community Vitality Moves Ahead**

The NDSU Center for Community Vitality, which was approved by the North Dakota Board of Higher Education in January, is moving ahead. The advisory board held its first meeting in July. Members of the board include Linda Butts, Director of the Division of Economic Development and Finance, ND Department of Commerce; Bill Davis, Outreach Coordinator, USDA Rural Development; Jerry Effertz, representing the State Board of Ag Research and Education; Gary Goreham, Professor, NDSU Dept. of Sociology/Anthropology; Cornelius Grant, Consultant, ND Workforce Development; Larry Leistritz, Professor, NDSU Dept. of Agribusiness and Applied Economics; Jay Leitch, Dean, NDSU College of Business Administration; Bill Patrie, Rural Development Director, ND Rural Electric Cooperatives; Randy Schneider, CPA, Senger, Mahlum & Gododhart PC; Terry Traynor, Asst. Director, ND Association of Counties, and Kara Wolfe, Asst.

Professor, NDSU Dept. of Hospitality & Tourism Management.

The center was created to help build vital communities in North Dakota. It will do this through the creation of educational resources and by connecting existing resources in higher education, agencies and organizations to communities. Programs housed within the center include the NDSU Extension Institute for Business and Industry Development, the “front door” to NDSU for business technical assistance; the North West Area Foundation Horizons Communities program; the North Dakota Rural Leadership program; the disaster education resources and the NDSU Extension community economic development and leadership programs and resources. See our Web page in progress at <http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/ccv/> for a more complete listing. We are trying very hard to search out relevant Web sites in North Dakota and across the country that would be useful to North Dakota communities. Please send us your recommendations for links that should be added.

I would appreciate your comments and recommendations on how the Center can be most useful to you and your community.

Sincerely,  
Kathy Tweeten  
NDSU Center for Community Vitality Director and  
Community Economic Development Extension Specialist

## **North Dakota Horizons Communities**

**Source: Lynette Flage, NDSU Horizons Community Specialist**

The North Dakota communities of Ashley and Ellendale and the South Dakota community of Eureka have been working together for the past nine months to plan and implement community-based programming that will result in more vital communities. They are the first cluster of communities to be involved in a community development program sponsored by the North West Area Foundation.

Following are a few of the activities that have been completed and have helped create a sense of community and the motivation and excitement to design their desired future.

- \* Community meetings were held in each town, gathering more than 800 total people to discuss their future. Ideas were generated and strategies planned with the help of NDSU’s Group Decision Center. Priorities were developed in each community and they are working together to address many of the identified opportunities.
- \* All three communities are participating in a nine-module leadership skills development training program.
- \* Eureka held a “funeral” to bury its past and invited its native son, Al Neuharth, the founder of USA Today, to deliver the eulogy. This loving ceremony helped provide a hope to citizens as they move forward to work on issues and a positive future.
- \* Access North Dakota Mainstreet, an electronic commerce program (<http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/ccv/techtran.htm>) through the Extension Service, has been sponsored and supported by Dickey Rural Networks for community members in the area. More than 30 business owners have taken part and are developing an Internet presence to sell and market their products worldwide.
- \* Richard Rathge, Director of the ND State Data Center (<http://www.ndsu.nodak.edu/sdc/>) presented valuable information to the cluster of three communities and a lively discussion developed on working together in future endeavors. Dr. Rathge assisted them in considering options and alternatives for housing for their elderly citizens.

- \* Ellendale is working on bringing the Head Start program to the community to assist young families who live and attend classes at the Trinity Bible College
- \* Organizations have started meeting regularly in each of the three communities to discuss issues and how they might work together to address them.
- \* The ND and SD Public Service Commissioners met in Eureka to discuss cell phone coverage in the region and assist the community members in improving the coverage. As a result of the meeting, the ND Public Service Commission announced an initiative to provide ample cell coverage throughout the state.

As you can see, there has been substantial progress made on impacting poverty in the region, while developing leaders, partners and the community. The second cluster of Beach, Regent and Mott, communities in southwestern North Dakota, is just beginning its planning process. More on those communities in a future issue.

## **"Characteristics of Nature-based Tourism Enterprises in North Dakota"**

**Source: Nancy Hodur, Research Associate, NDSU Dept. of Agribusiness and Applied Economics**

Recreational activities related to North Dakota's wealth of natural resources are well-established in North Dakota. In recent years, North Dakota's abundant resources have attracted visitors from around the country and the world. In addition to providing recreational activities for residents and visitors alike, natural resource-based tourism is a basic sector that may have considerable potential for creating economic opportunities in rural areas. Recognition of the potential importance of resource-based tourism to rural economies is well-advanced in other parts of the United States. However, little attention historically has been paid to tourism in North Dakota. While much anecdotal evidence exists suggesting that natural resource-based tourism is growing in North Dakota, no basic research on the sector has to date been completed. The goal of this study is to identify and analyze existing agricultural and natural resource-based tourism enterprises in North Dakota.

For a complete copy of the report go to: <http://agecon.lib.umn.edu/cgi-bin/detailview.pl?paperid=14774>

## **Life in North Dakota Student Internship Program Pilot**

Life in North Dakota is a program of NDSU Extension, the NDSU Department of Sociology/Anthropology and participating NDSU college faculty. It introduces undergraduate students to community-based learning for leadership and service. <http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/ccv/lifeinnd.htm>

The NDSU Extension Center for Community Vitality and Dickey County NDSU Extension Service agents conducted a pilot program this summer in Ellendale and Oakes. We had two students participate from the NDSU College of Engineering and Architecture's landscape architecture program. Angela Hansen, a professor in the department, was the faculty adviser for students. She reviewed and approved the projects as well as conducted biweekly site visits.

The purpose of the project is to provide not only a quality work experience for the student but also a community experience. The philosophy behind the Life in ND program is to cultivate the practical art of living well in a place rather than simply residing there as an occupant. Projects are designed to immerse the student in the cultural and natural environment of the community. Our hope is that students will discover that quality jobs exist in rural communities AND they are a great place to live!

The summer program is 10 weeks long. The students are paid by the local business or community organization for 30 hours per week and volunteer for 10 hours per week, providing their expertise to community-based projects. Employment was provided by the Dickey County USDA Soil Conservation District and the joint sponsorship of the Oakes Park Board, Oakes Economic Development and the Oakes City Council. Fran Brummund, local coordinator of the project, was instrumental in the successful recruitment of sponsors and in identifying quality projects for the students.

## **“Why Didn’t I Think of That?” by Wally Eide**

**Source: Wally Eide, Director, North Dakota Ag Innovation Center**

The two major dragons you are going to confront have names, one is time, and the other is money. I’ve said before, in 14 years of working with inventors, most tend to underestimate both the time and money it will take. It is time to face those realities again and to be honest with yourself and think with your head and not your heart. How much time are you really willing to devote to this project (it might take two or three years just to get your idea ready for the marketplace)? How much money will it take to get this idea to market? Where is the money going to come from? Is the rest of the family behind you? What exactly is your motivation for developing this idea? What are your strengths in running a business? What are your weaknesses in running a business? How will you capitalize on your strengths and solve your weaknesses? Can you handle failure?

There is a graph that illustrates the commercialization process. The point we are about to enter in the commercialization phase is actually referred to as the “valley of death.” It is termed this because it is where most new product ideas die for lack of money and time. All your idea is going to do from now until the sales start rolling in is consume time and money.

Let’s take the next step in evaluating the idea. An independent evaluation might be in order. It is going to cost some money, \$200 and up. There are two places we are familiar with that do these evaluations. One is Wisconsin Innovation Service Center, <http://academics.uww.edu/BUSINESS/innovate/innovate.htm>, and the other is the Innovation Institute, <http://www.innovation-institute.com/>. As with any of these organizations you consider dealing with, you might ask for some references and a sample of their work. If you decide on this idea evaluation service, read over their materials carefully so you know exactly what you are buying. The receipt of these reports will represent another milestone in the process and will represent another go or no-go decision.

These reports could take a couple of months to get completed, so while you are waiting you might as well, if you haven’t already done so, start working on a prototype. This is actually the fun part for most inventors, developing a working model and then tinkering with it. In fact, it is so much fun that we have known quite a few who never get done tinkering. They always can make it just a little bit better. When this happens, the idea has turned from a potential business venture into a hobby. People get a kick out of developing an idea and spending the money to get a patent to hang on the wall. It is, after all, a form of immortality, a way of standing out and being unique among all others. And you know what? That is OK! It is OK as long as it is your time and your money and not anyone else’s.

Are prototypes always necessary? Generally speaking, yes. We tell people to develop a little speech about their product. If you can’t convey your product idea to somebody in a minute or less, then you are going to need something to show and/or demonstrate. The other reason for a prototype, of course, is to demonstrate and test. There are liable to be several different versions or models. (I’ve never seen one that worked the way it was supposed to the first time.) The first one can be made out of cardboard, plastic, wood, metal, fabric, etc. The prototype doesn’t have to be perfect the first time. You will refine the function and appearance as you go along.

Now, continue with the market research. Take your idea and show it to some friends. I wouldn’t make a financial decision on what your friends say, but friends are really good to practice on. Don’t tell them I’ve got this great idea and expect them to confirm your suspicions. Use them as a sort of research panel and try to determine if your product’s benefit is obvious, clearly different, significantly better and does it have any emotional appeal, you know, like teddy bears. I’ve even known some that have found farm machinery emotionally appealing, but that’s another story.

If your idea is a consumer item, you might want to consider setting up an impartial research panel. You might work with a business class from a local college or high school. Depending on the type of product you have, you might use a sportsmen’s club, gardening club, etc., and get their impartial input on your product.

I’ve known folks who have run ads in magazines to get an idea if people can quickly grasp their product’s benefit. Your ad should invite people to either buy the

product or request more information. I wouldn't recommend you ask for advance payment unless you already have product to ship. If you can't ship or provide a refund in a short period of time, you could get yourself in trouble with the Postal Service. You could be in the manufacturing business but it might be license plates.

A word of caution: It takes a lot of guts to share your idea with someone else, but you had better get used to handling criticism of your idea. I've known inventors who are so enamored with their idea they can't take any criticism or rejection of their idea at all. If this is you, then you are in for a long and disappointing time. On the other hand, if you think you can handle rejection, there is a test you can use called the "smirk test." The smirk test isn't real scientific but it is free. Show your idea to someone and watch for the smirk; if the smirk doesn't show up and they ask some intelligent questions, this is a good thing. If, however, they were like my friends and broke out laughing, then maybe there is still some work to do. I may need some new friends who can recognize a good idea when they see one.

Okay, you spent \$500 and waited eight weeks getting your idea evaluated. The reports may have given you the confidence to go on to the next step or they may have persuaded you to drop the idea altogether. At this point, after adding up all your costs, including travel, telephone calls, material for the first crude prototype and even having your idea professionally evaluated, you would probably be under \$1,000. If you decided to have a professional patent search done, add another \$800. You have only just begun your financial journey into the "valley of death."

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